

# FREYA STARK

## *Letters*

EDITED BY LUCY MOOREHEAD



VOLUME ONE

THE FURNACE AND THE CUP

1914-30



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*Also by Freya Stark*

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THE VALLEYS OF THE ASSASSINS

A WINTER IN ARABIA

BAGHDAD SKETCHES

LETTERS FROM SYRIA

EAST IS WEST

PERSEUS IN THE WIND

IONIA

THE LYCIAN SHORE

ALEXANDER'S PATH

RIDING TO THE TIGRIS

ROME ON THE EUPHRATES

THE JOURNEY'S ECHO

THE ZODIAC ARCH

THE MINARET OF DJAM

*Autobiographies*

TRAVELLER'S PRELUDE

BEYOND EUPHRATES

THE COAST OF INCENSE

DUST IN THE LION'S PAW

24 October 1929

FLORA STARK

Dearest B.,

Just a line to say all is lined up for my departure at six tomorrow morning. And I have five introductions (native) for Baghdad. I had a lovely day in Damascus – it is the most fascinating of cities. I now realise under what a strain I enjoyed it when I was here, every noise and jolt a pain to me: now the jostle and dust and tumult is just part of the fun. I strolled through the *Suqs*, called on my dark friends and found only the lady and children at home: another lady, her neck wrapped in white with a black veil – the picture of St. Theresa – came in: she was commissioned to find a wife for the son of the Vizier of Haiderabad who is travelling for pleasure in Syria.

Then back to the El Azms. The Moslem family took me to its bosom, and I am going away laden with walnuts and raisins, and a little mother-of-pearl casket to keep kohl in for my eyes, and was kissed all round, and given heaps of letters.

Your own

FREYA

VIVA JEYES

The Zia Hotel, Baghdad

26 October 1929

My dearest Viva,

I got here yesterday. I was rather glad to arrive, though the native company did its best and gave me a good car and driver; we covered the ground in nine hours the first day and twelve the second with a really excellent chauffeur who made the rough places as smooth as the nature of them would allow. It is a wonderful experience – and better in a way in the open car with all the vagaries of native casualness than in the respectable seclusion of Nairn. The English ladies who were to travel with me had turned into a Turkish family from Aleppo whose male members keep a rather low-down eating house here; and a Levantine gentleman, polite but slippery. We never stopped for lunch, but went on and on from eight in the morning till night over the immense empty spaces. Camels, hundreds or thousands, countless anyway, were at the fringe of the greener country – but then there was nothing, no life but a few birds, no green but some faint patch in the worm-wood or the rushes, the red and yellow earth lying in almost invisible ridges, hour after hour with no life but the white sheets of the mirage slipping away before us, like lakes and islands in the distance. Here indeed the sun like a strong man runs his race, and *nothing* is hidden from the light thereof. The convoy, scattered at great distances over the waste, rushed

We had another very delicious meal in the evening, and then sat out on cushions, the starlight over the walls of the court and a lamp in a glass lantern lighting us up. I discovered that I could play chess with the uncle. We then had the lute out, and the plump lady in her white evening gown played, while the uncle got his pipe out and accompanied her. Then Amatellatif's bed and mine were spread on the floor, and we all retired.

This is now my fourth day, and I feel quite accustomed to the harem, though not inclined for a lifetime of it. There is a deadly boredom about it. The way of passing time is not really more monotonous than the way most of the girls at Dronero, say, spend their time; and the talk – clothes, gossip, relatives, food – is exactly the same. The only difference is one of possibilities – someone very strongminded *can* get out of the rut at Dronero; here, I don't see how they could.

Yesterday we talked to one of the herd-boys, a Beduin lad hired from his tribe to look after the village goats. They asked what he carried in his bundle. 'Bread,' said he, 'will you eat?' He earns 19l. [4/-] a month, and yet his offer to share was perfectly genuine and his manners those of an equal.

We had another afternoon with the gramophone, and another walk in the evening, and a long talk with Amatellatif about herself and things in general. It is all very like Italy only rather more so. She has a cousin who wants to marry her, but she won't and is allowed to say no; on the other hand, a man she would have liked has been refused by her brother. She is such a pretty, elegant girl, and her sister, too, and they seem to be very happy in their seclusion.

They are all amiable to me though we talk little, my Arabic being really very inadequate. In the evenings and afternoons the Effendi spreads his carpet in the *dar* and intones the Koran in a beautiful voice: the two older ladies, their heads swathed in white, spread their carpets behind him and pray in silence holding their two hands palm upwards for the blessing from heaven. I would like to watch and listen, instead of having to go on playing dice close beside them with the young people who seem never to pray at all.

You would be surprised to see me now, as I am writing with the eternal gramophone and the ladies sewing, and my eyes are – according to them – much beautified with a long black streak underneath them. Soon I shall go and have a bath. It is all wonderfully clean and nice in its own way. It is only the communal life I find difficult.

Tomorrow we return to Damascus, and I must get all ready to leave at six the next morning.

Your own

FREYA

along with spirals of sand behind it. In the evening in the starlight we came to Rutba, a light shining far out over its windowless wall – four towers, and a gate, and a tribal policeman with the wild Arab face and star on his forehead, with his long red cloak and the gun in his hand, standing at the gate which is always kept closed. It is very like the sort of place the Jinn used to produce when the lamp was rubbed, I am sure. And then you dine on salmon mayonnaise and custard and jelly and read the sort of notices on the walls that might belong to a golf club-house in the country, and the British officials are all talking shop or shooting or such and look so nice after the French in Syria. What a different atmosphere it is – quite indescribable. Meanwhile the poor Aleppo ladies and such eat whatever happens to be inside their disreputable bundles and sleep in heaps inside the cars in the courtyard. I could not insist on spending the night in my comfortable little room when they wished to be off, but there was a vagueness about the time of starting which got me out of bed first at ten, then at twelve, and finally at one. The gate was opened: 'Peace be upon you,' said the soldiers. In no time the light of Rutba was swallowed up, and nothing human left but a faint gleam from our consort ahead, which soon lost itself also. The desert is very immense when one is alone in it at night. The old moon was on one side and Orion, swinging over half the heavens it seemed, was on the other, climbing before our eyes in the cold clean air. At eight we reached Ramadi and customs, and in another three hours, at 2 p.m., we saw the Tigris and clattered over the long bridge of boats to Baghdad.

FREYA

VENETIA BUDDICOM

The Zia Hotel, Baghdad  
October 1929

Dearest Venetia,

It is very remarkable – here I am in Baghdad. I sometimes wonder how it comes about. It is a long flat city in a flat land, and all you see as you come from the west is a fringe of palms and a mosque. The bridge of boats is not nearly as beautiful as it sounds, and there is a faintly English flavour of the 'High Street' about the one tarred road which runs down the length of the town. But the *people* are there; and I shall be very happy I do believe. That is after all the real interest: the people here are of all fascinating sorts – the beautiful ones being Kurds. Never have I seen more fine-looking men, so agile and strong with legs bare to the thigh and red turbans, and long hair under, and a wild aquiline handsomeness that is quite intoxicating and I only wish I could paint it.

The Christian ladies appear to go about in the lovely silk wraps which

have vanished from Damascus, and the Moslems wear their '*abeias*' in a clumsy way over the top of their head with a black veil. I got here very tired and did nothing yesterday but write to a man who is recommended by my friend in Damascus. I hope he may come to help me to a room and am waiting to see before going visiting among British and being told not to.

This morning however I did stroll among the narrow little ways and grated wooden windows, the mysterious blank walls. I came in a little quiet corner to a little garden with an open door, and old Sheikhs in turbans sitting round a crowd of small children with books – it was a pretty sight. Just opposite I noticed an Arabic script saying, 'This house is empty and for sale.' It is only a blank wall, but I have taken the name and am going to look into the matter and see if I might not settle in it till the place is sold. Five gentlemen in tarbooshes were very pleased to help me with the address, which I could have managed in time for myself.

I am now here with only £10 till November 15th, but feel optimistic enough for anything.

Your

FREYA

FLORA STARK

The Zia Hotel, Baghdad  
28 October 1929

Darling B.,

Mr. Munir Wakil has just turned up – the Bahaist\* friend of my black tanner friend in Damascus – and has come up to the scratch beautifully so far, except that I was rather overcome by finding him a lovely tall young man with meeting eyebrows and full lips and a most amiable expression, dressed European and with the sort of Highland onesided headdress which the government officials here wear. He is in the irrigation. He is going to find a room; and if not soon, then he will ask me to come and be a fifth among his four sisters. And he will come *every* day at three to show me Baghdad. What am I to do if all my native introductions prove as overpowering, and the day with only twenty-four hours? Meanwhile I find I live here in luxury, bath, tea, and all included, for 15/- a day: it is very pleasant to be comfortable for a bit, but am wondering if my ends really will meet.

I went round to the museum this morning. The Ur collection is amazing – the sheer beauty of the gold work so remarkable, and very wonderful to find the filigree jewelry, the mosaic, and inlaid ivory of the Italians, here in Mesopotamia nearly 6,000 years ago. These old Sumerians appear to be the people who brought its civilisation to Egypt. But where they in their turn came from is yet unknown.

Today I discovered the markets, all vaulted brick arches, with lots more light than Damascus, and even more fascinating from the varied types. There seem to be two distinct Iraqi types, one full round face, with thickish underlip, one long very narrow face with pleasant quick eyes and rather high heads. Then there are the magnificent Kurds, and the Christians, Assyrians, Jews, Greeks, Turks, Persians, and who knows what, beside the real Arabs from the desert outside. The Christian women wear the lovely silk wraps (like my white and silver one) – all beautiful colours, a joy to watch as they go about the streets among the black veils of the Moslems.

It is very pleasant to be in a free country again. What a difference it makes, and why, is hard to say, but one feels it everywhere. And the people may not like foreigners, but there is none of that sense of fear: they behave as if they know they will be fairly treated – it is the same sort of pleasant feeling a dog gives when he comes up to you instead of crouching his head when you move your hand, which is what you always feel in Syria.

The Shi'as are fanatic here and one cannot enter their mosques. I should like to get into touch with them, but it is a toss-up as one cannot very well combine Shi'a and Sunni and I don't know which my fate is to be.

Love from

FREYA

\* Religious sect founded in Persia in the nineteenth century.

FLORA STARK

Baghdad

30 October 1929

Dearest B.,

I went yesterday to Mrs. Drower's\* and came back sadly disappointed and much perplexed at finding no letters from Asolo. It was dreadfully disappointing.

Mrs. Drower was very pleasant. She is kind and sensitive and cheerful. We had just had tea when Mr. and Mrs. [Leonard] Woolley walked in. Mrs. Woolley is remarkably fascinating, with something strange and possibly cruel about her: but quite irresistible I should imagine. It was quite sad to leave the pleasant house, all so beautifully clean, and comfy chairs and books.

Today I have had tea with my Bahai friend – a fascinating way through the poorer quarters, across the old bridge of boats, one thread of mixed humanities, the yellow city in long lines of warm brick behind: through the unfashionable markets, dirty and crowded with every colour and smell, and then through little back streets into a small court with the brick house built round, and the mother and grandmother, and relays of sisters to

receive me. They were very pleasant, and my Arabic got along – and I was able to consume one large glass of pomegranate juice, tea, and biscuit, and two candied apples – very good.

I left them and went to Mrs. Drower's as it is her Arab at home day. She speaks Arabic fluently – I do envy her. I miss all sentences that are over about ten words.

Your

FREYA

\* Wife of legal adviser to Iraq Govt.

ROBERT STARK

Baghdad

2 November 1929

Dearest Pips,

I thought I had got a house yesterday – three rooms, a roof and a cellar, newly whitewashed and painted blue round the windows and window bars: and a handsome varnished door with Venetian gothic arch and brass knobs. The roof is surrounded with corrugated iron rather askew for privacy, with holes cut in it so that one can look out without being seen. The stairs are steeper than anything that doesn't belong to mountaineering, and I don't remember any glass in the windows now I come to think of it – but there is a lovely tree to look at, sprouting from a mosque courtyard. The rent of all this is something above 1/- a day, but the hitch is that they want to let it for a year, and I cannot go to more than six months. So my friend Munir Wakil the Bahai says to the people that I don't want it anyway and we wait developments. The whole neighbourhood took a friendly interest, and produced the latchkey, which is over a foot long. The place is near the big new straight street, and very convenient – more so than the other possibility which is across the old bridge of boats in the poorer suburb and far away from everything. But it is now in the hands of Allah and my Bahai, who promises to have me settled by the end of the week.

On Monday I go to stay a few days with Mrs. Drower, and so see the leading side of Baghdad. She is very charming, and so kind and interested in the people and knows a lot about them, though she did not know or believe that anyone could get a lodging for 1/- a day or near it. But I think the nicest way to know people is *not* to be important or wealthy and so come upon their genuine kindness: if you have a position here, it is always that which counts, and many tales are told of the way the native turns from you if anything goes wrong; but I find that they are as kind as can be to me who have nothing to profit them by.

Your own

FREYA

Baghdad  
3 November 1929

Darling B.,

I've got my house! I've had to take it for a year, but an obliging friend of Munir's is going to write a paper promising to take it off my hands for ten per cent less than I pay whenever I want to get rid of it. How to pay is now the problem, and I have written to Barclays to tell them I shall overdraw. Do please see that that cheque from Mario comes the quickest way, for I shall be *desperate* if I don't get it by the end of the month: I can just last till then, by overdrawing for the rent. It's almost too like the *Arabian Nights* to be penniless in Baghdad.

I missed the opening of Parliament because I was laid up yesterday, and am still groggy on rice and milk, and very cross with a cold and this internal upset. I quite see why the old Babylonian religion thought of legions of demons in the encompassing atmosphere: one just breathes them up as one goes out, and it seems that now till the rains come is the worst time. It was 89.6 in the shade at 8 a.m. yesterday – just comfortable for me.

Your

FREYA

HERBERT YOUNG

Baghdad

8 November 1929

Dearest Herbert,

I must write to you this time, and especially as my news is all so satisfactory: my cold gone or nearly; my house actually rented; and a kind unknown lady has just offered to lend me a horse to ride on. Every morning I go to school and learn Arabic in a class with twenty-six little naughty girls who all rush to lend me their books, pencils, seats, paper, and advice and listen with awe when I read very slow and correct sentences out of the third Arabic reader.

Mrs. Drower is kindness itself, and introduces me all round both to native and English, so that I feel I shall soon know the whole of Baghdad. In her early days here she used to speak Arabic well and Gertrude Bell used to damp her efforts with snubs. It seems that her Arabic was nothing very wonderful, just as Lawrence's, and Kitchener's and all these celebrated people – rather a comfort to the despairing student. They made a little go a long way.

As soon as I get settled, I am going to look out for a Mullah to tackle the Koran and start work seriously.

Lots of love.

Your

FREYA

Baghdad  
10 November 1929

Dearest Car,

Just think what I have done today. I have been threading little blue lapis lazuli beads from Ur on a pink thread for the museum. Mrs. Drower brought them home in a cardboard box, all mixed up with bits of bones of ladies who attended the queen's funeral and were then knocked on the head. They are nearly four thousand years old, and just like what you find in Venice now, except for the value of the stone they are made of, and it is marvellous to think what instrument was small enough to pierce those tiny holes.

Your

FREYA

ROBERT STARK

11/186 Amara Quarter, Baghdad  
14 November 1929

Dearest Pips,

I have just got into my house. A lady at dinner last night asked me if it is 'fit for an Englishwoman to live in', and I'm sure I don't know, but it looks quite nice once you climb through my dank little well and up the incredible steepness of the stairs (of which only the narrowness keeps you from falling down headlong every time, so that you are like Pickwick's cab horse, supported by the shafts). I have also got an Armenian maid coming tomorrow and a nice boy in the meanwhile.

A tragedy has just taken everyone by surprise: the Prime Minister, who seemed quite happy when sitting next Mrs. Drower at dinner on Tuesday, came home from the club on Wednesday night and shot himself dead through the heart. He was the most if not only honest man in the cabinet, and comparatively a friend to the British. He wrote a letter to his son, a boy of nineteen now studying engineering in Birmingham, and went out on to a veranda over the river, and shot himself, his wife holding his arm and begging him to shoot her instead, and his daughter looking on. It was just that these filthy politics were too much for him and he was so badgered by every party that he could stand it no longer. Mrs. Drower and I watched the funeral as it passed our window: there was a huge crowd, very silent, but no hostility visible.

I am just reflecting what an awful place one of these flat-roofed towns must be in times of massacres. There is no way of defending your house, for anyone can walk over from the next roof and find himself at once and with no barrier in the heart of your house. I have put a pot of paint just in

anyone's way coming down from the roof to my bedroom, and if a cat comes along and overturns it in the middle of the night I shall get a most awful fright for nothing.

Your own

FREYA

FLORA STARK

11/186 Amara Quarter  
14 November 1929

Dearest B.,

I don't think my house is really fit for social functions: my new Armenian maid said it was dear at 330 rupees a year. I have moved in today and painted a green bookcase, and the Bahai came and put the curtains up and procured me food from the restaurant in one of those little contraptions which consist of one dish on top of the other in a sort of pyramid. Tomorrow I hope to get fairly straight. My joy at present is concentrated in my two pet animals, modelled in steel from Isfahan: one is a wild sheep, the other an ibex: they are very lovely, and Mrs. Drower has baptised them Aku and Maku, which means 'there is' and 'there is not', and sounds very like them.

Ever so much love dear B.

Your

FREYA

OLIVIA BARKER

c/o Mrs. Drower, Baghdad  
18 November 1929

Dearest Olivia,

I thought this was going to be quite a nice slum and as full of human interest as the narrow street will hold. However in a moment of weakness, a sore throat and a smell and the advice of all my friends combined, I went to the poor little man who has the impossible task of keeping Baghdad healthy, and asked him if the dead ancestor or whatever it is might be removed. He came along amiably and as soon as he saw the house began earnestly begging me to leave it, and has found me a room over the river. A nice American woman\* has offered me a room also, and I am now hovering between the two. Otherwise Baghdad is all I asked for. I happened on the nicest of the English and I have got my lessons all fixed up, except Koran study. They are not thrilling in themselves, but I have come to the conclusion that it is the only method by which one can really get at this people. If you had seen the two grim old Shi'a Sheikhs this morning and the absolute transformation, the look of tenderness, the only word that describes it, when my friend told them I had come on purpose to study the Koran.

I have been looking into Assassins and find Persian is essential. Who

knows? One life is an absurdly small allowance, and Canada every eighteen months or so an added complication; so that instead of the moral repose that I ought to get in Europe if I ever want to work, it is just one rush and fatigue. Papa's things just as hopeless as ever; he *won't* have a partner, and can't and wouldn't wish to leave. And now he writes so happily that I cannot wish for anything else. After all I do think that to be busy with the work you enjoy is as great a happiness as one can wish for. Mama and Papa both have that in a measure which very few people manage to get.

I am being interrupted all the time by my Armenian maid. I cannot let her sit in the smell downstairs and so she is doing embroidery beside me and suffering from my silence. It is such fun to have this funny little place all to myself. I have spent £15 on furniture, stoves, and 1s. 6d. a day for rent, and am quite heartbroken at leaving.

Your

FREYA

\* Mrs. Kerr, head of the girls' school.

VENETIA BUDDICOM

Baghdad

24 November 1929

Dearest Venetia,

The greengrocer who lives opposite in a little open booth sold me his black and white headcloth to cover my tea table when I gave a party, and came the other day to say that a wealthy Moslem was anxious to give me lessons on Arabic and to read English with me – all for love: at least I hope not that but anyway not for money. He was described as middle-aged with a family, which turns out to be thirty-five, pleasant plump and grizzled. He doesn't seem to care much about the English, but sits for two hours chatting Arabic and going through the newspaper with me, and has now suggested a visit to one of the Shammar chiefs up the Tigris. I don't think it is really essential, but it seemed to me it would look better to ask for a chaperone, but I must say that the presence of even the most understanding and charming official person seems to cast a shadow.

I am not to be here long, in this house I mean. All the ghosts of all its inhabitants arise and smell during the night till I can hardly breathe and I am looking for something less poisonous; though otherwise I do enjoy being in this disreputable quarter. One day it is a fortune teller coming up, you pass your hand on a mirror and then she looks and sees what is not, with a plausible air: yesterday a small street fight and the night before a death with rows of black hooded women crouching in the dim courtyard and shrieking their barbarous grief. The street is not more than two yards

across. All the refuse is thrown there and collected on donkeys early in the morning so that the atmosphere is slowly degenerating through the day. The trouble is with the houses however, every family living over its own cistern where the accumulated filth of ages oozes up through the brick and makes for the parchment faces and sunken eyes and, I am sure, the jaundiced fanaticism which distinguish the townspeople here. In the night you hear sharp whistles at intervals, and that is the police – but whether the whistle is meant to startle the householder or the thief I haven't yet fathomed. Anyway a smart Iraqi in uniform came with a big book and got nearly a rupee out of me for the nightly protection.

I had a ride yesterday south to the Dyāla river, a good hour along the top of a dyke called the *bund* which gives a view of the yellow hard desert earth and shallow hills. The river would be nothing special elsewhere, but here its still sheet of water and grey-green trees (willow I believe) were like a sudden revelation of loveliness, and we came back by a wood through the government experimental farms, well watered and with trees planted on the roadside and shooting up, and smelling sweet like England.

Your  
FREYA

FLORA STARK

Baghdad  
25 November 1929

Darling B.,

Your letter and, to tell the truth, the two enclosed cheques came as manna in the desert yesterday. I found them at Mrs. Drower's when I went to get her advice before plunging into the next housekeeping adventure. I had seen a dear little house with Mrs. Kerr in the morning in a clean and respectable part of the Moslem quarter – really a dear little house for £20 for six months. I would have settled on this if I had not seen the room on the river, and yesterday Mrs. Drower gave me tea and we went across, and when she saw the lovely view, and big court with shrubs growing in it and a view of palm trees behind, and nice wide balcony over the Tigris she said I could not do better and that the distance wouldn't really matter. So I have taken it from Wednesday and do hope to be really settled by the end of the week.

I went from school to Dr. Raghīb's family and took the two ladies to look at the museum: their only comment on the treasures of Ur was that they should have been dusted more carefully. They have lived two years just opposite the museum and never knew of its existence. Their idea of pleasure is to drive in an open car round the suburban roads of Alwiyah and 'look at the English', a sort of substitute for a zoo. I was taken, and found it quite

amusing to watch the curious spectacle of my compatriots, playing golf, etc., from this new angle.

It is rather nice to meet these friendly genuine Moslem elements again, with no thought of politics among them – which seems to be the disease of Iraq: and it seems that the feeling is not really so friendly at all. What the people really want is not very clear, for the demand for independence is just made by a few politicians who know that they are asking for what has already been agreed upon. I think it is much more a sort of psychological problem – a feeling of superiority which is I believe quite real but which we do not trouble to hide, nor notice that it is a barrier. My Bahai and his family are doing all things for me for nothing, and the teacher brought by the greengrocer is teaching me for nothing: if I were a proper Britisher I should not allow this. I should insist on paying, they would charge too much, and neither would like each other. As it is I shall have to find really nice presents for them, and they will have the two pleasures of being kind and getting a present, and there will be a pleasant relationship.

My teacher will follow me across the river. He is a funny little fat man and sits on his own stomach in an upright manner and tries to be polite while I read the rude things about the English in the paper. He doesn't believe the Koran himself but is pleased that I should like it. He has been among the Beduin and at Stamboul, and is a very fair type of the modern civilised Arab.

Your  
FREYA

ROBERT STARK

Baghdad  
27 November 1929

Dearest Pips,

It has just dawned on me that this will be a Christmas letter – my loving wishes. I wish I could fly over and spend it with you.

I am lurching at this hotel, having taken refuge from the dust storm which is whirling outside – as I have no house of my own today. I have abandoned my own. All the neighbourhood told me I was wrong to leave them: I feel rather poor-spirited myself.

I get a ride out into the desert twice a week and get the good air into my nostrils. The ground is lovely of course because one can go where one likes, but very hard now and with troublesome shallow holes. They play polo and as soon as the first rain has laid the dust I am going to look at a match. But I find that my time is getting desperately full and my teacher always stays two hours instead of one and often more, and spends the time telling



me of the delinquencies of the English. My Arabic is not good enough to argue but I hope to get my own back in the spring.

My new room has a balcony and four big windows on the river and its only drawback may be cold and the distance. The nearest way is by boat across to this (eastern) side and then along the ugly new street which is tarred and runs right through Baghdad and is pseudo-European. My school is off it at the far end among the little narrow ways: every day I turn off at the blue and yellow tiled bate of Haidar Khaneh mosque and go up past half a dozen Beduin women crouching over baskets of their flat bread, past a group of Kurd porters with red striped cotton turbans and thick felt waist-coats, by a sweetshop and a mattress carder's and a corner where an old one-eyed man sits in the dust with a tray of dusty pink and white poisons for innocent children, through a district of private houses with studded doors and latticed balconies almost meeting overhead, till I reach the school. It is quite an ordeal to read aloud in class etc., but very good for the Arabic, and I know really more of the grammar than most of the children, though less of the spoken language.

It seems that even the British here have picturesque imaginations and have been asking whether I am a spy or a Bahai. It is beyond anyone to think that one can do Arabic for *pleasure* it seems.

Your loving

FREYA

Baghdad

[end] November 1929

VIVA JEYES

Dear Viva,

My new house belongs to Michael the Shoemaker from Mosul and his wife and two dear little boys, and my room has five big windows on the river and a wide balcony in front and the sun after just peeping in of a morning goes round and shines in at the opposite window for an hour or two before setting. Not all the panes are quite entire, but Mrs. Longrigg the wife of the financial adviser has sent me four lovely heavy woollen rugs which I have hung up today. The Longriggs and Sturges live just a few houses further up so that I am now not only healthily but even respectably situated. I only hope this may not discourage the Arabs. Communications are supposed to be easy. The first day we went down to the riverside and shouted out to the boats which are supposed to act as buses: 'Oh father of the boats hear us,' but the father of the motor wasn't taking any notice and I had to run along the river bank and cross by the Maud bridge of boats. Down the river bank southwards are flat mud hovels where the peasants

live: a little pale maid in her dark blue gown and with her slim little figure and silent barefoot walk comes every morning with a bottle of milk. She has a gold circle with turquoise and little gold dice hanging from it sticking in the nostril and her name is Jamila.

On Tuesday I had tea with a Syrian girl educated at Columbia University, and now teaching here, and then met one of the local editors, and an Armenian who is translating Lawrence (and doesn't think very highly of him). These were all particularly anti-English. It seems a dreadful pity. My hostess said to me rather pathetically, 'We should so much like to be allowed to love the English, if they did not always make us feel they were snubbing us.' On the other hand not more than about two people in a thousand can find any interest in *really* mixing with the natives. So what is the way out? It is all a wonderful drama, and I love to be watching it, but it is a heartbreaking job to those who have given their best years to it and see it not only unrecognised but with every prospect of being annulled very soon.

Your loving

FREYA

FLORA STARK

Baghdad

6 December 1929

Dearest B.,

Feeling *very* homesick. I sent you a telegram the other day for my fancy dress, for Mrs. Drower tells me I shall be going to a dance at New Year, but I do not know: at present I am feeling uncomfortable, as all the people I meet (except dear Mrs. Drower and Mrs. Caparn) are rather suspicious of me and have been asking whether I am a spy. I fear it will be very hard to keep in favour with both Arab and British, and the tragedy is that we seem to have brought a whiff of our own snobbishness among the Iraqis: I find that those I come upon independently are much nicer and more genuine than those I know through British introductions.

I found out that L[ionel] Smith<sup>28</sup> had wandered into my slum and left a note, and so I went to the Education Office and finally saw him — such a charming person, refreshingly unofficial to look at. He has lent me a pile of books, and led me down by the old bridge along the river's edge a new walk home, and talked about walking tours, and is inviting me to dine next week.

Today was a blustering rainy day and my teacher, packed very tight in a raincoat which swathed him without a crease (except a few horizontal ones), came for me at two, and we launched out into the choppy muddy expanse of the Tigris with great difficulty, the stairs being coated down the bank